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Benefits and difficulties in using peer response for writing in the EFL classroom

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Abstract

Peer response has been in the interest of teachers and researchers for a long time, and there is a substantial amount of research on the topic. Therefore, this paper strives to explore and summarize the benefits and difficulties in using peer response for writing in the EFL-classroom by reviewing articles and books on the area. Suggestions on how one can work with possible difficulties will also be examined. Scientific results will be presented as well as opinions of both teachers and students, as these are just as important when it comes to using peer response in the classroom. In order for this kind of concept to be beneficial, both students and teachers must be comfortable and have faith in the mode of procedure used, as one of the difficulties presented is students doubting the efficiency and helpfulness of peer response. Finally, a few suggestions for further research will be presented.

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1 Introduction

The main focus of this report is peer assessment, which is a branch of formative assessment. In this paper the term *peer response* will be used for what is also commonly referred to as peer feedback, peer review or peer evaluation. Formative assessment is based on the process of learning and focuses on progress, rather than results, which is the focus of summative assessment (Hedge, 2000). Formative assessment can be performed by oneself, a teacher, or a peer, and in this case it is the feedback from peers that is in focus. Furthermore, it is peer response on writing that will be investigated in this paper.

However, it is not peer response in any context, it is peer response in classes where English as a foreign language is taught (EFL). In this report, English as a foreign language refers to English in a country where English is not an official language. That is, English is not needed in order for these students to get by in the country where they live. With that said, it needs to be mentioned that some of the articles reviewed in this paper are not about EFL learners. A few studies have been made on native speakers of English, and a few on ESL learners (English as a second language). All that is written on these two groups of learners may not be directly applicable to EFL learners, due to the differences in for example language proficiency, but it can still be relevant to the development of research on the EFL classroom. Furthermore, several of the studies used in this literature review were conducted in Asian countries, and this needs to be taken into consideration when looking at the results. Due to cultural differences between for example China and Sweden all results may not be applicable to Swedish students, since these two groups of students might respond differently to peer response. In addition to this, the groups of students in the studies used are in several cases university students, which also is a factor to take into consideration. Given the different maturity levels of university students and high school students for example, there is a chance that this would have an impact on the results and that the results may not be fully applicable to all ages.

A substantial amount of research has been made on peer response during the last three decades, showing its growing importance in schools world wide. It is by many considered to have positive effects on students' learning, and in this case, writing (see, for example Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Zhao, 2014; Min, 2005). The wanted and perceived benefits of using peer response include that students get a more developed sense of self-regulation, audience awareness as well as the possibility of using it as a tool to increase the students'

awareness of their own learning. In spite of the positive attitude towards the usage of peer response, there are studies that show that there are in fact quite a few difficulties that need to be overcome if peer response is to work in the classroom. One of the biggest concerns among students is that their peers are not proficient enough to provide feedback (Hu, 2005; Rollinson, 2005; Tsui & Ng, 2000). Furthermore, friendship bias is a problem found in several studies (Cheng & Warren, 2005; Harris & Brown, 2013; Tang & Tithcott, 1999).

Peer response is considered important by Swedish school authorities, but the question is how much it is used, how it is used, and if it is used in the most efficient ways. In English classrooms it should be used to fulfil one of the criteria in the curriculum for English. This criterion, which needs to be included in every course of English in all Swedish upper secondary schools, states that students should be able to work with both their own and others' texts and oral performances in order to improve and adjust to the purpose of their assignments (Skolverket, 2011). Furthermore, peer response is included in the assessment support for Swedish schools (Skolverket, 2011), where it is claimed to help students understand the assessment criteria as well as it gives them a chance to see different ways of solving a task. Since peer response is included in the Swedish curriculum for English and needs to be present in every English classroom, more needs to be known about peer assessment and its benefits and difficulties, and how to work with the latter.

2 Aspects of using peer response

2.1 Benefits of using peer response

The aspects to consider when wanting to use peer response are many, and teachers might sometimes ask if it really is beneficial and worth the time. A few possible answers to these questions will be presented and discussed in this section.

The benefits of giving feedback have been examined in a study conducted by Lundström and Baker (2009), where two groups of students were given two different tasks depending on which group they belonged to. One of the groups was assigned to give peer response and the other one was assigned to receive peer response. Both of the groups were given the same essay which was written by a student of their proficiency level. The group that received feedback was to revise the essay (with help of comments in the margins), and the group that gave feedback was to provide suggestions on how the essay could be improved (with the

comments in the margins removed). However, the students were never given the opportunity to give feedback on essays that their peers had written, nor did they receive feedback on their own writing. This was done so that the researchers could “control for differences in students writing” (p. 33). The results of the study showed that the students who got the opportunity to give peer response improved their writing more between the pre- and post-test than did the students who only got to use feedback to revise. The students who improved the most were beginners, and they improved in overall and global writing aspects, which include organization, development and cohesion. Hence it follows that giving peer response was beneficial.

Zhao (2014) reports on benefits of peer response detected in interviews with Chinese university students. Firstly, students claimed to learn while reading their peers’ writing because they sometimes included ways of thinking and structuring that were new to the reader. Furthermore, if the texts contained errors, the students could also learn from that because they made the same errors themselves. Secondly, students reported that because of the similarities in their proficiency level and background, they could understand the writing of each other better than their tutor sometimes could. Thirdly, students felt more comfortable when discussing feedback with their peers than when they discussed it with their tutors, which led to deeper discussions and coverage of more areas with potential for improvement.

Similarly, Min (2005) found that students from a university in Taiwan reported on the benefits of making suggestions for improvement while giving peer response. They suggested that in order to be able to give good suggestions they needed to look up new words. These words were then later integrated in the students’ vocabulary. In addition, the students claimed to have gained more awareness of their own writing and difficulties, and started to look for solutions for themselves in the same way as they looked for solutions for their peers when giving peer response.

Hu (2005) conducted a study on his students over the course of three years in order to develop an effective practice for peer response. At the end of the research period, when he had found a way of working that both he and the students were happy with, several benefits of peer response were suggested. The students claimed, as is also mentioned above, that they learned much about writing just by reading what their peers had written, as well as they learned by providing peer response. Moreover, they believed that their peers had good suggestions for improving texts they had written. Motivation was also a factor, as the peer response made it possible for more people than the teacher to read the writing of the students.

This also contributed to making the students more aware of the audience when they were writing, possibly making the assignments feel more real and less of just a text for school.

In agreement with Hu's findings, Villamil and de Guerrero (1998) conducted a study regarding the impact of peer response on writing. They found that receiving comments from their peers had a great effect on the students, who incorporated much of the feedback that they were given. Furthermore, Villamil and de Guerrero suggested that the peer response used may have lead to a degree of self-regulation. That is, the students were influenced to take more responsibility for their texts through the act of giving and receiving feedback from their peers, as well as they became more aware of their texts and what could be done to change them. Moreover, the students' awareness of their audience increased when they were writing, as they now had to write so that their peers would be able to understand them, and not only their teacher. In similarity to this, Rollison (2005) suggested that writers need an audience, and the best audience there is is one that can give response immediately, so that the writer can change potentially confusing or difficult aspects of the text.

In her book on the use of peer response groups, Løkensgard Hoel (2001) pointed out that students benefit from peer response because of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, as cited in Løkensgard Hoel, 2001). By working together, students will learn from each other and teach each other new concepts and perspectives. This can happen both when working with written interaction and when reading other students' texts. This way, students can borrow parts from each other's texts, come up with solutions of how to make peers' texts better and also improve their own writing. Moreover, Løkensgard Hoel claimed that using peer response contributes to making the students more aware of their own learning (2001, p. 239). In order for peer response to work, the students continuously need to think about how it works and when it does not work. When faced with these questions, students need to think about how they learn and when they learn, and also how peer response works for them and in what form.

A study on the use of peer response training and its effects was conducted on students at a Canadian community college (Rothschild & Klingenberg, 1990). This study showed that students who had been trained in using peer response with the help of a certain scale developed more positive attitudes towards writing than did the control group which was not trained. The experimental group did for example view their grammar and vocabulary as having improved to a further extent than did the control group. Furthermore, the students in the experimental group claimed to have more ideas for writing after going through the training and they also believed to be better at organizing their texts afterwards. The same

questionnaire was given to a different class later, which had gone through the same training, and similar to Hu's claims (2005) they perceived peer response as being helpful when it came to giving feedback and reading each other's texts. However, they did not feel that receiving feedback was equally helpful. Even though the results of the study by Rothschild and Klingenberg (1990) showed positive effects after training, this might in some respects be obvious. We do not know if the control group had any chance at all to work with feedback, but if they did not, it is only natural that a group working closely and thoroughly with their writing through feedback should perceive their improvement more substantial.

Tang and Tithcott (1999) investigated the effects of using oral peer response in peer response groups and found several benefits. Firstly, the students claimed that reading their essays out loud to their response groups helped them detect errors in their writing, that is, they became more aware of their texts. Secondly, the students actually used the feedback their peers provided them with when they revised their essays. However, the revisions did not always improve their texts and the suggestions were not always appropriate. In spite of this, there was a benefit to the usage of feedback even of the faulty kind, which was that the students developed a sense of having an audience. Thirdly, Tang and Tithcott found that "students provided scaffolding in peer response sessions" (1999, p. 33). The term scaffolding is used to describe that students (or teachers) provide support for a student through for example clarifying questions or explanations. The most common strategies for scaffolding used by the students in this study were instructing, announcing, restating, requesting clarification, clarifying and eliciting. Last but not least, students also reported to have gained self-confidence by working in the response groups. One question that should be brought up regarding the process of the peer response is why the author of the text was not allowed to discuss with the peers providing feedback. The author was only allowed to listen and take notes, not to defend their work or argue their case. It is doubtful that this is the most beneficial way in which to carry out peer response orally, since the students will have no way of discussing their work or understanding somebody else's viewpoint completely. It was however efficient as proven by the study, but there might be ways of improving it.

A study carried out by Tsui and Ng (2000) in a secondary school in China, showed several benefits for using peer response when writing. Similar to previously mentioned studies, consciousness of having an audience was reported by the students. One of them explained that when the teacher is the only person reading the text that he has produced, he does not have to try so hard to make the teacher understand. However, when he was aware that his peers were going to read what he had written, he wanted to make sure that they would

understand what his intentions with the text were. Another benefit that was pointed out is that students developed “a sense of ownership of text” (p. 162). They did not feel obligated to use all the comments they received, they rather discussed them with their peers and after that decided if they wanted to use them in their revisions. Furthermore, students claimed that it was helpful to work with peer response because they had a chance to help each other. They recognized that they had different areas of knowledge and that they could fill the gap for other students as well that they could be helped to fill theirs. In addition, it was not only receiving comments from peers that helped in revising texts, it was also the act of giving feedback. By spotting weaknesses in their peers’ writing the students became more aware of their own writing, hence they could improve it even without much input from peers or their teacher.

A study comparing the effects of using peer response and self-assessment by Mawlawi Diad (2010) showed that the students in the group that used peer response managed to correct more errors than did the students in the group that used self-assessment. Both groups had the same training on editing essays before starting to look at their own and each other’s essays. The errors in focus were subject/verb agreement, pronoun agreement, wrong word choice and awkward sentence structure errors. Even though this study was very specific in which errors students were supposed to look for, while not looking at the effectiveness of peer response compared to teacher feedback, it has value in this literature review. The study shows the meaningfulness of letting students work together and to read each other’s writing. That kind of activity also allows students to discuss with each other, which in turn can lead to more learning than had been achieved if they only received feedback from themselves or from a teacher.

In a study carried out at a Taiwanese university by Lin and Chien (2009), sixteen students went through training for peer response, wrote an essay, and thereafter used peer response to give feedback on each other’s essays. At the end of the study, seven of the participants filled in a survey sheet with questions regarding their attitudes towards using peer response. The result showed that a majority of the students preferred receiving feedback from their peers, as opposed to receiving feedback from their teachers. Furthermore, the students also claimed that they felt their peers’ feedback easier to read than that of their teacher, due to the fact that they felt more relaxed with their peers. Students also suggested that they enjoyed peer response because that gave them insight in the proficiency of their peers, which made them feel more comfortable. Lastly, motivation and inspiration were factors that increased through the use of peer response, and five of the seven participants answering the survey wanted peer response to be used in their class again. Even though this study showed positive results and pointed out

many benefits of the usage of peer response for writing, there are a couple of elements that should be commented on. Firstly, only sixteen students participated in the study, which makes it rather small. Nevertheless, it can still hold valuable information. Secondly, looking at the questionnaire, mainly leading questions can be found, not giving any space to express opinions outside of the questions or to explain why a certain stance was taken. If that had been possible maybe more details on the usefulness of peer response could have been discovered as well as difficulties. However, the students did fill in that they agreed or strongly agreed where they could have put “not agree” if that would have been the case, which is why the results still can be seen as accurate.

Bryant and Carless (2010) suggested after having done research on peer response in China, which is a very test-dominated setting, that using peer response may help students prepare for examinations. Instead of having to use strategies such as memorization, students could learn what kind of errors they usually make through the use of peer response. When this has been done, the students can more easily be prepared for what kind of mistakes they will possibly make, and they will in turn be more aware of these and maybe be able to spot more of them in a test situation.

2.2 Difficulties involved with using peer response

A quite substantial number of studies have been made on peer response and its different benefits, as shown above. However, there are also difficulties that one can encounter when working with peer response.

In a study made by Harris and Brown (2013), three teachers from New Zealand and their students answered questions about the usage and implementation of peer response in their classrooms. The researchers also visited the classrooms one week in each class to video record the usage of peer response. At the end of the study especially two things had turned out to be difficult when working with peer response. Firstly, students had a tendency to value teacher response higher than peer response. Secondly, students were sometimes worried that their comments would upset their peers, which led to friendship bias. Harris and Brown also noted that in addition to valuing teacher response higher than peer response, they did not trust their own ability to make accurate judgements.

Friendship bias was also found by Cheng and Warren (2005) in a study made on 51 Chinese undergraduate students, about peers’ feedback on language proficiency. In interviews

four of them stated that it was difficult to give close friends entirely fair marks due to the fact that they did not want to hurt their friends. Similar student opinions were found by Tang and Tithecott (1999). In addition to this, the students in the study judged that they were not qualified to give peer response to their peers because they lacked knowledge of the English language that they felt they needed to complete such a task.

In contrast to the findings by Harris and Brown, and Cheng and Warren, Azarnoosh (2013) found no friendship bias in her study. The students in her study provided a list of their closest friends in the class, and the peer responses were later analysed. That is, did it make a difference when students gave feedback to their closest friends and when they provided feedback for the rest of the class? The results indicated that it did not make a difference who the students gave feedback to. Azarnoosh explained this with the fact that the students had been in the same class for at least two years, hence, they all knew each other relatively well and were all friends. This might have led to unconscious bias, which means that the students did not mean to be lenient when giving feedback on each other's texts, but since they were all friends it is possible that they unconsciously did not comment on certain errors for example. One must be aware of the differences in how these two studies were carried out, however. In the first study it was the students' opinions which were measured and in the second one it was results. Both seem to be valid, and it seems important to take into consideration that we do not know the opinions of the students in the second study.

Another type of bias was shown in a study on Japanese university students who gave feedback on anonymous papers (Matsuno, 2008). In comparison to the other studies where students knew who they gave feedback to, this one used anonymous papers. The students who gave peer response showed bias towards the low-achieving students, being stricter when they gave feedback to high-achieving student. In this study an evaluation form was given to the students and they filled this in for each essay they responded to, rating for vocabulary, content, organisation, sentence structure and grammar. Taking this into account, we do not know what the results would have been if they had given feedback in the form of comments. Maybe the students providing the feedback would still have been stricter with high-achieving peers or maybe it would not have been as apparent as it was now when they had to put a number on every aspect.

An addition to previous points made is that students sometimes prefer teacher response so much that they will not be willing to use the feedback that they get from peers (Hu & Lam, 2009). Even though Hu and Lam state that the results were statistically insignificant, it is an interesting fact to look at. The students who were negative towards their peers' ability to

provide feedback were not as prone to use the feedback they got as the students who did not feel negatively about it.

Students' concerns are a major issue when using peer response, and they should be taken seriously. Harris and Brown (2013) found that students were sometimes afraid to disappoint their teacher when using self-assessment, believing that they had a certain rank in the class which would be lowered if they did badly. This led to them not being able to focus on the task and that they did not use self-assessment in order to learn, but rather to show their teacher that they understood something. These findings regarded self-assessment, which is different to peer response in that when it comes to self-assessment it is the students giving feedback to themselves without anyone else being involved, in contrast to peer response where there are other students providing the feedback. Even though these two are rather different in their approaches, they are similar in the way that in both cases there are students providing the feedback instead of the teacher. Due to this, the results may be applicable to the use of peer response as well, since teachers in many cases read the comments that their students make on others' work. The same claim was made by Nilson (2010) who suggested that many students see the teacher as their only audience, hence this is an important person to keep happy. This leads to the students feeling that it is more important that their teacher is happy with them than that they actually learn something from the task they are performing.

Similar to Harris and Brown, Hu (2005) found that his students involved in a course of English academic writing did not trust their peers to make valid comments. Even if they would succeed in that task, the students had a fear of not being able to distinguish between useful and not useful comments from their peers, and would therefore not use them in their revisions. Along the same lines, Rollinson (2005) suggested that students sometimes feel that only a writer better than themselves could possibly assess their own writing, making peer response difficult to implement as students in the same class often are more or less on the same level of language proficiency. Tsui and Ng (2000) found similar concerns of the students in their study, claiming that they could not trust their peers. This led to the students not being willing to even take their peers' comments into consideration because they claimed to already know that they were of no use.

Løkensgard Hoel (2001, p.21) found yet another difficulty, which concerns time. She suggested that peer response is, at least in its initial stage, very time consuming. This might scare teachers off from using it. In addition to this, the starting process of peer response can also be demanding for the students since they are not used to the kind of responsibility peer response demands. Løkensgard Hoel concluded that this might result in chaos if the teacher is

not properly prepared. Another objection against the usage of peer response is that the students are not able to give feedback that is substantial enough, and end up giving comments that do not help the writer to improve their text. This has to do with the fact that the students are not familiar with the criteria used to assess texts. The same results were concluded by Min (2005) who reported that the comments from the participants in the study were often not substantial enough and did only include one step, for example pointing out the problem. However, just pointing out a problem might not always be enough for the person receiving the feedback. There needs to exist understanding on why it is a problem as well as how to solve it.

In agreement with Løkensgard Hoel, Bryant and Carless (2010) in their study on 34 Chinese primary school students found that the students perceived the teacher's comments as more valid and useful than the comments of their peers. The latter often not involving any kind of criticism, but mostly praise. They also showed concerns about making their classmates upset if they were to write a comment with criticism in it. Furthermore, the results showed that students of lower English proficiency felt uncomfortable giving feedback to peers with a higher English proficiency, and instead of trying to give peer response would just assume that no errors were made by their peer. The peer with higher English proficiency in turn felt that the peer with lower English proficiency could not use the feedback provided. The students in this study were given, and gave, feedback to the same peer all year because of a seating arrangement made by their homeroom teacher. The theory on the zone of proximal development, building on the belief that students with help from peers or teachers can reach a level of proficiency that they cannot reach on their own (Vygotsky, as cited in Løkensgard Hoel, 2001, p.87), suggests that it would be beneficial for a less proficient and a more proficient peer to work together. However, Løkensgard Hoel claimed that one should avoid having two such different proficiency levels in the same group (2001, p. 105).

In his study on stress related to different forms of assessment at an Australian university, Nigel (2010) found that peer assessment, more so than assessment by a tutor, induces stress in the students. Nigel explains this as the students wanting to perform better because they would get peer response from their classmates, and concludes that better performance and stress correlate. In the study, four groups participated, one which received feedback from a tutor only, and three groups who received additional feedback from either themselves (self assessment) or their peers. What is not mentioned however, is if these students had ever worked with peer response before the time of the study. If they had not encountered this way of working before, maybe the stress could have come from not being certain what one should

do or how to behave in the situation, rather than stress induced by the fact that their peers would read their texts. It also needs to be mentioned that this study was conducted in a research methods class and not in an English class. It still had to do with the act of writing texts and giving feedback however, and is therefore relevant to this literature review.

2.3 Possible solutions for fighting difficulties

As have been seen so far in this literature review, there are both many benefits to using peer response in the writing classroom as well as difficulties. To make sure that students are able to benefit as is described and to counteract the difficulties, one needs to know how that is done in the best way. This section will treat possible solutions for fighting the hardships of peer response and also suggestions on how to use peer response in the classroom.

First and foremost, many researchers seem to agree that training before starting the peer response process is important to help students develop into confident peer response givers and receivers (Rollinson, 2005; Min, 2005; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Hu, 2005; Zhao, 2014; Topping, 2009; Saito, 2008). One way of going through this kind of training is described in Zhao's study on 18 university students in China (2014). By reading students' writing and explaining to the students where something could be improved and in what way, the teacher made their own response process available to the students. Min (2005) used a similar approach where the students had the chance to look at essays written by former students and learn how their teacher would comment in relation to the system for commenting that was used in this study. It may be advisable to let the students start commenting on texts that have not been written by their peers, since this may help them remain objective in the task and not fall for friendship bias. Furthermore, Min (2005) reported that students had a new approach to writing comments and using peer response after the training session. One suggestion that seems especially valuable is to make students understand that they are not to comment on their peers' texts as teachers, but as readers. When they understood this, they started to be more empathetic when giving feedback, which in turn led to them providing feedback which was more helpful for their peers.

Secondly, as mentioned in the section on difficulties, many students are concerned about the effect comments will have on their peers and they do not dare to write comments that can be seen as negative and will therefore use praise instead. To counter this and to create an environment where it is okay for students to discuss their work and to share content with each other, Hansen and Liu (2005) suggested that teachers help to create a comfortable

environment for the students. To achieve this they suggested that the teacher can initiate icebreaker activities, as well as letting the students work together in groups often. This way, the teacher can be made aware of possible difficulties in the group and may be able to work with them and prevent them from happening when engaging students in peer response.

Thirdly, a concern that was expressed by the students was that they did not feel proficient enough to give feedback to their peers, and also that they were not aware of the criteria used for writing. One way of solving this is to let students design their own peer response sheets and come up with their own criteria (Hansen & Liu, 2005). Similarly, Topping (2009) suggested that the students should be involved in the development of criteria, as well as a part of helping to clarify the criteria and explaining what they mean. He suggested that this might be a way of making the students feel less anxious about the task at hand, that is, peer response. Although seemingly efficient, some critique has been pointed towards the use of peer response sheets. A study made by Hyland (2000) conducted on two university classes with two different teachers in New Zealand, showed that the group using peer response sheets more often had a more negative attitude towards the end of the study than did the group that did not use peer response sheets more than on one occasion. Hyland claimed that the negative effect of using peer response sheets lies in the fact that they can take away students' spontaneous reactions to a text. A peer response sheet might also be considered by the students to be "just another work sheet to fill in" (p. 51), which would in turn counteract the feelings of motivation that peer response sometimes can bring. Furthermore, Hall (2009) suggested that sometimes students are so involved with filling in peer response sheets that they do not have time or energy to engage in the actual peer response. In conclusion, peer response sheets can be very useful and helpful to guide students when giving feedback, but they can also interrupt the spontaneity of giving feedback. The solution is not to altogether abandon peer response sheets as they can provide great support for the students, but every class and student are different, therefore, every teacher should decide for themselves what kind of peer response sheet should be used, if any, and how it should be designed.

Finally, Hansen and Liu (2005) suggested a few approaches to make peer response easier for the students. The teacher should instruct the students on how to ask meaningful questions and what those kinds of questions might be. This procedure can help students start a discussion and will bring them to more meaningful conversations. Furthermore, students may need support on how to express one's opinions in a way that no one gets hurt and in a way that will help the person receiving the feedback.

3 Conclusion

Many studies have found both difficulties and benefits, proving that peer response is not altogether unproblematic. It may be suggested however, due to the many benefits of this approach, that it is worth taking the risk. The benefits found are that students learn through reading each other's texts as well as they learn through the errors of others. By detecting errors in someone else's text, students can become aware of their own errors as well. In addition, it has been shown that students feel more comfortable working with each other than with a tutor or a teacher and that students can gain self-confidence through working in response groups. Self-regulation is also to be found among the benefits for peer response, and it is suggested that students can become more aware of their own learning as well as become aware of the fact that every text has an audience.

Counteracting the benefits are the difficulties that can be encountered, the most substantial ones being that students value feedback provided by a teacher higher than that of a peer and that they do not trust their own or their peers' ability to give peer response. This leads to the students not wanting to use the comments their peers give them. Furthermore, friendship bias has been detected in studies on peer response, which may lead to students only giving praise to each other, something that is not very valuable when it comes to helpful feedback. Lastly, starting to use peer response might be time consuming, and the students might have difficulties providing feedback because they feel unfamiliar with the criteria used to assess writing.

Despite the many possible difficulties, there are many suggestions that might help. Firstly, researchers have suggested that training to use peer response is important for it to work, as students will become used to the way of working and become more confident in the process. Secondly, it is suggested that students can be a part of creating peer response sheets and grading rubric, this way they will be aware of what criteria are being used, which will help them both in their own writing process as well as when they provide peer response. Apart from making students aware and comfortable with the process, it is important that they are comfortable with each other. A comfortable learning environment where all students are okay with working with each other should be achieved before working with peer response. Seeing to the benefits and the difficulties, it seems like peer response is a good idea to use when teaching writing in the English classroom. Despite the many difficulties, those are problems

that can be solved, and once that has been achieved, there are only the benefits left to work for.

To conclude, a few suggestions for future research will be presented. There is already a great amount of research concerning peer response and the implications that exist for using it. However, it would be interesting to see more on how peer response is actually used and what students and teachers think of it. Furthermore, it would be rewarding to see research from a European context, preferably Sweden, since much of the research made on peer response is carried out in Asia and North America. Moreover, as mentioned in the introduction, peer response is a part of the Swedish curriculum for English and it would therefore be especially interesting to see how much it is used in Swedish high schools, how it is used and why. Two questions that could be looked into are: What are the motives behind using peer response and how has it worked? Is it used solely because it is mentioned in the curriculum for example, or is it used to benefit students in the best way possible? In conclusion, much has been learnt about peer response and its dynamics already, but a few areas are still more or less unexplored and ready to be researched.

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